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SRC President's Address
To the 9th Annual Meeting

A New Era in Human Relations

By Marion A. Wright

I SUPPOSE that at every annual meeting of the Southern Regional Council it would have been possible to review the Southern scene and find evidence of notable advancement in the field of race relations. I am glad we have not spent our time in that way. Few things are more agreeable than being patted on the back — even if we do it ourselves. But there is a soporific quality about such gymnastics; it induces a feeling of well-being which may cause one to rest upon his oars even if much of the course remains to be rowed. Time spent in self-congratulation may be better devoted to girding ourselves for tasks that lie ahead.

Now, with great inconsistency — and who any longer pays attention to that hobgoblin of small minds? — I point out that, with the year 1953, we may have come to the end of an era in human relations in the South. Progress has been cumulative, in a kind of geometrical progression. Beginning with jury service and the ballot — elementary rights of the citizen — the courts have honored their great traditions with epic decisions affecting education, transportation, parks, playgrounds, housing, restrictive covenants in deeds and, generally, all the areas in which discrimination rested upon a legal base. This action of the courts has been matched, in part, at least, by Congressional action and a whole series of courageous executive orders. The federal courts, the Congress and the executive arm have moved with solidarity and identity of purpose to implement specifically the broad guarantees of the Constitution.

This occasion presents a convenient opportunity for us to make public acknowledgment of our feeling of obligation to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. In a very limited sense, I have no personal concern with the brilliant legal victories which the Association has won. In the narrowest sense, those were victories by, of, and for colored people. But in the broadest sense, they were victories for white, yellow, red and brown people wherever they may be.

I do not teach school, so I am not directly concerned with whether or not a Negro teacher shall receive the same pay for the same service as a white teacher. But I like to think that I live in a land where merit is rewarded with an impartial hand and where no doors are shut in the face of deserved advancement. And I like to think, too, that I live in a land where every man has the right to participate in government upon equal terms with every other man. Only in such an atmosphere may government draw its creative force from everyone of its citizens.

That Association has helped to secure

for this and succeeding generations the privilege of living in a land where such rights are protected by law. By so doing, it has placed every mortal eternally in its debt.

Now, of course, there is a vast importance in Constitutional provisions, statutory law, executive orders and decisions of our courts. There must be discipline in an ordered society, and statutes, decrees, orders do serve that function. American judges, unshackled by a dead past, have written glorious and absolutely necessary pages in the history of civil rights. The significant fact about these decisions, as one of the profoundest of our judges, Justice Cardozo, long ago pointed out, is that, like all wise decisions, they tend to mirror and reflect the spirit and philosophy of the age when written.

NOT BY LAW ALONE

But law is not the be-all and end-all of that struggle. Law must receive its final sanction in acceptance by public opinion. Prohibition is so fresh in our memory that we need not labor the point that laws and decrees which fail to achieve the solid backing of public opinion are, to some extent, futile.

To illustrate: whatever the decision of our Supreme Court in the pending segregation cases may be, for many years to come in most of the Southern States, the appointing power will be in white hands. This applies specifically to school trustees, county and state boards of education. The personnel of such boards will be determined, with very few exceptions, by white officials. They have an area of discretion which the courts will find it difficult to invade or to control. Such officials will be charged with the duty of carrying out consolidation of white and Negro schools if the decision should be against segregation. Such officials will be charged with the duty of equalizing facilities to the last degree if the decision should be in favor of segregation. In other words, whatever the result, such officials will be placed in position to attempt evasion and unfairness, to practice inequities of various kinds, or to give the decree that ungrudging compliance to which it is entitled and which would be warmly applauded by the civilized majority of mankind.

It is asking a great deal of the Negro to have complete confidence in the fairness of a board which fashions policy and controls expenditure but from which he is systematically excluded.

So the Southern Regional Council will urge, as a matter of simple justice, that Negroes be appointed to membership upon such bodies. Already, here and there throughout the South, Negroes have been appointed to such boards. The governor of North Carolina named a distinguished educator and former associate executive director of the Council, Dr. Harold Trigg, to the State Board of Education — action which, as a North Carolinian, I am proud to say, met with universal acclaim.

We propose to try to influence such appointments by the procedure followed so successfully in the case of Negro policemen: that is, by constantly reiterating the arguments and appealing to the public conscience. More important, we shall give all proper publicity to the appointments which have been made, upon the theory that everybody's doing it is more compelling than you ought to do it.

A FRESH APPROACH

Do not the times in this year 1953 call for a fresh approach to the entire matter of discrimination? Heretofore the battle has been fought upon the issue that the Negro has certain rights and, in good morals, he cannot be denied their exercise. That is the correct philosophical basis upon which all of us have heretofore proceeded. My criticism of this philosophy is that it is negative and that the argument should now be put upon a positive and, I think, a broader ground.

From this point on should we not take the tack that there is a distinct lack in our society arising from the failure of full Negro participation? We have abundant argument by analogy. I do not wish to seem facetious, but is there any segregationist who will deny that participation of Negroes in sports has greatly elevated American athletic standards? I seem to have heard of a fellow named Joe Louis, another named Jackie Robinson and still others with names like Jesse Owen, Roy Campanella, etc., etc. Who would deny that music has been enriched by Marian Anderson and a whole host of performers

of comparable talent? So with literature, art, education, science, or what have you.

Is it not reasonable to suppose that the same race which has poured its rich talents into the stream of American life would, if given the chance, do the same thing for government? And again, illustrations like Dr. Ralph Bunche will flood your mind as they do my own.

But, apart from analogy and illustration, is the argument not a sound one upon historical considerations? Members of the white race have enjoyed all of the privileges set forth in the Bill of Rights for long generations. They may have come to accept them as a matter of course, as a matter of due, and not as privileges for which men have died.

SENSE OF SACREDNESS

The Negro, on the other hand, has been engaged in struggle for centuries and to the present moment in order to secure precisely those rights for himself. Men highly prize the thing for which they have struggled and made sacrifice. There are about thirteen million Negroes in the South. They are ready and anxious to participate as full-fledged citizens in all of the affairs of state. Is it not reasonable to suppose that, granted the ballot and granted official authority, they would move into the discharge of their duties with a superior sense of the sacredness of their task?

The farmer puts fertilizer upon his soil. A large part of it leaches ultimately into the salt and resounding sea. The land must be constantly re-fertilized if it is not to become sterile and barren. Democracy likewise must be fertilized by ideas and ideals which come up from the mass of its citizens if it is not to become decadent. We in the South will ultilize a vast natural resource when we bring into all departments of our life the impulse of the fresh and eager and ardent spirits of our newly enfranchised citizens.

Let us, therefore, not abandon the high moral position that minorities have rights which, in good conscience, they should exercise upon the same terms as the majority. But let us also stress the argument that we are a wise and provident people if we do utilize to the fullest the endowments and capacities of every member of our society.

There is another argument which I think deserves to be stressed. That is, one cannot practice chicanery upon one segment of our people without having moral repercussions upon the actor. It has hardly escaped notice that those people who have fostered their Boswell amendments, their grandfather clauses and their doctrine that a political party may be converted into a social club — the people who used such tools against the Negro have come also to use them against their fellow whites. Witness the sordid events behind the struggle between the Taft and Eisenhower delegates at the Republican National Convention. Witness also the leaving of Mr. Truman's name off the ballot in certain Southern states. Those were intra-racial, not inter-racial, bits of sharp practice. Such devices come naturally to be employed against fellow whites by those who have successfully used them against the Negro.

Low and unethical standards of conduct will inevitably infect in all of their relationships those who originally set up such standards for the limited objective of depriving a minority of its rights.

In one sense it may be said that society advances by re-defining its terms. Words accumulate baggage as they move through the centuries. Through usage in new relationships they acquire new meaning, larger meaning. For example, the word "freedom" as used by Shakespeare carried but a fractional part of the broad mental content which it has for us in 1953.

RE-DEFINING CIVIL RIGHTS

We hope that we may contribute to a re-definition of civil rights. Of course, many such rights rest upon a solid legal base. They depend upon laws and courts for their enforcement — such rights as voting, jury service, equal pay for equal work, access to facilities in transportation, education and the like. But when the last statute has been enacted and the last decree written, what may we have? We may have a sullen, grudging compliance with the law, doing exactly what and no more than the law requires, doing it because of penalties which follow upon failure. Admittedly, even such reluctant and spiritless recognition of minority rights represents a distinct advance in human

relations.

But surely society is not properly ordered where this kind of an armed truce prevails, where men stand and glare at each other, do only what they are compelled to do — because a pistol is aimed at their heads. Such men have not come to maturity in the sense of being civilized and urbane.

Men add cubits to their moral stature when they do what is right because of an inner, not an external, compulsion, when they act as gentlemen through desire, not through fear.

STRESS ON CIVILITIES

In the new conception of civil rights, stress will be upon civilities, no less than upon rights. It is not so important that one should have the right to sit next to another as that he should offer his seat when courtesy or good breeding requires. It is more important to be gracious than legalistically correct. The letter killeth but the spirit giveth life. Ultimately, civil rights are not to be wrung from, but graciously conferred by, majorities.

So we must create in the South — we should like to see it prevail everywhere — the atmosphere and volume of good will which shall ultimately render recourse to the law unnecessary in order for all men to live in complete equality with each other. Then men shall act, not because of the harsh voice of authority saying, "Thou shalt not," but in response to inner promptings of the heart saying, "I should."

These are some of the things which we hope we may do in creating the South of the future.

The crucial and regrettably necessary legal actions of the NAACP have been won. Of course, there may still be skirmishes, delaying actions, rear guard engagements. But one is blind who cannot see that the conscience of the country has spoken through its courts. And conscience will beat no retreat.

If we may liken these great legal conflicts to making war — and I do so only to point an analogy — then we face the problem of making peace. American history abundantly proves that this may be a far more difficult task. To make war, only physical courage is required; to make peace, there must be courage of a moral sort. It requires a Lincoln to be able to say from the heart, "With malice toward none, with charity for all." Yet that is the goal which we must hold before ourselves.

Whether it knows it or not, the South stands today at the hour of decision. What course shall it pursue? Shall those dressed in a little brief authority drag us back into the eighteenth century? Shall we share moral isolation with the Union of South Africa? Is Premier Malan our spokesman, the philosopher of our public policy? Are the apartheid doctrine, India's caste system and Hitler's ghetto the best that our leaders have to offer?

I don't believe it. The weight of reason, the weight of religion are against such a course. In the South, reason and religion have long enough been throttled. These giants now begin to stir. And all of their power propels us into a new and better order, an order in which with pride we take our proper place at the side of the civilized majority of mankind, an order in which the worth and merit of the individual are the only touchstones of supremacy.

The task of leadership in 1953 is to unleash the forces of reason and religion in the South.

ANSWERS FOR GRADUALISTS

In the years that lie ahead it will be relatively easy to deal with the deliberate evasiveness of reluctant officials. It will be much more difficult to combat the sweet reasonableness of the gradualist. Difficult because he appears to agree with all that you say; he disagrees only as to timing. Ultimately, he says, but not now.

We must point out to the gradualist that it is immoral to ask a citizen to accept future delivery of a present right. He may be dead and gone before the right accrues. What the gradualist does is to ask a minority to accept, in lieu of the cash to which it is now entitled, a promissory note due at an indefinite date to be fixed at the pleasure of the gradualist.

We must point out to him that there is no such thing as rights of a *race*. We are concerned with rights of *individuals*. A part of our boast as a nation is that, unlike certain other nations, we have respect and regard for the dignity, the worth, the rights

of the individuals. How sincere are we?

The early Christians, confronted by the corruption of Rome, did not propose to the Romans that *a little at a time* they give up their vices. And the rich young ruler was not advised to make an orderly liquidation of his estate, selling this year his cattle, the next his lands, then his home, so as not to upset the market, and distribute the proceeds among the poor, taking care not to coddle them.

Conversion, for men or states, involves no gradual break with a past one sincerely wishes to renounce.

We must tell the gradualist that the only way of life worthy of our attachment is one which constantly changes, which is always in a state of flux. To revere an ancient and a fixed way of life is to indulge in ancestor worship, which is a kind of living death.

It has been over 700 years since Magna Carta was signed, 168 years since the Constitution of the United States was adopted and 81 years since the Fourteenth Amendment was added. These instruments proclaim or vouchsafe, full and equal rights under the law of the land, including, specifically, the right to have no burden placed upon one, no discrimination practiced against him, because of his race. No people have excelled us in our professed attachment to these theoretical rights. But their translation into actuality has been a process accomplished by struggle and the rarest sort of courage.

No one of us who is honest would for a moment deny that there has been this discrepancy between the ideal and the actual. Of course, the ideal will never be completely attained. In airplane motors or precision watches, there may be a tolerance of one ten-thousandth of an inch. But as this deviation from the ideal is increased, the machine loses efficiency and finally it destroys itself.

Psychologists tell us that all of us at times move in something of a dream world. But when the gap between the dream and the reality becomes too great, our reason is dethroned.

So, society may tolerate for a time the proclaiming of high ideals and the practice of sordid conduct. But, ultimately, in its own protection, society must insist that we begin to live up to the fine things which always we have shouted from the house tops.

We come now to such an hour of decision. All of our past, all of our better instincts and all of the moral force of America and the world at large unite to impel us to move willingly and even eagerly into a new era in human relations in the Southern states.

Anti-Suffrage Scheme Outlawed

On May 4, the U. S. Supreme Court ruled out what may be the last legal device by which Negroes have been denied effective use of the ballot. By an eight-to-one vote, the Court held that the Jaybird Democratic Association of Fort Bend County, Texas, was a political party whose express purpose was to prevent Negroes from voting in the primaries, "the only election in the county that counted."

The defendants had denied that their racial exclusions violated the Fifteenth Amendment. They contended that the Amendment applied only to elections or primaries held under state regulation and that their association was not regulated by the state, but was a self-governing voluntary club.

However, the president of the Jaybird Association admitted to the Court under questioning that the party was designed to keep Negroes from voting in the county primaries. All white voters in the county, upon paying the poll tax, automatically become members of the Jaybirds, who have endorsed every successful candidate for office in Fort Bend County since 1889.

The judgment of the court stated:

"We affirm the District Court's holding that the combined Jaybird-Democratic-general election machinery has deprived these petitioners of their right to vote on account of their race and color. The case is remanded to the District Court to enter such orders and decrees as necessary and proper. . . . In exercising this jurisdiction, the Court is left free to hold hearings to consider and determine what provisions are essential to afford Negro citizens of Fort Bend County full protection from future discriminatory Jaybird-Democratic-general election practices which deprive citizens of voting rights because of their color."

From the *Atlanta Constitution*

'AND THAT SOUTH, THANK GOD, IS . . .'

In 1866, in a speech delivered at Tammany Hall in New York City, Georgia's great Ben Hill began a speech thusly:

"There was a South of slavery and secession — that South is dead. There is a South of Union and Freedom — that South, thank God, is living, breathing, growing every hour."

This was the first "New South" speech.

And Ben Hill was right. The New South, beginning to live, breathe and grow in 1866, has progressed slowly — like all things growing in a soil made poor by war and ruin.

May was a signal month in the political progress of Negroes in the South. Ten Negro candidates were elected to local offices in North Carolina and Georgia.

Nowhere has the meaning of these elections been better expressed than in the accompanying editorial from the Atlanta Constitution.

But it has kept growing — every hour.

Some months ago in Augusta, Ga., where the race question has been unworthily agitated by individuals hoping to prosper from it, a Negro university man was elected to the school board. He was from a ward largely Negro in population.

Recently, five North Carolina cities and towns elected Negroes to their city councils. In Wilson (population 23,010), in Chapel Hill (population 9,177), in Gastonia (population 23,069) and in the city of Durham (population 71,311), Negroes were elected to office for the first time since Reconstruction Days. Chief significance of these facts was that racial feelings and prejudices traditionally are more concentrated in smaller cities and towns. Greensboro (population 74,389) Negro Councilman William Hampton, first elected in 1951, was re-elected.

Atlantans awoke Thursday morning to find they had elected the able, qualified president of Atlanta University, Dr. Rufus Clement, to the city's school board. He, too, is the first Negro to be elected on a city-wide basis since Reconstruction Days. The fact that two other Negroes were elected to the City Executive Committee on a ward basis went almost unnoted.

When Atlanta examined the vote tabulations, its wonder grew. Dr. Clement had carried 40 of the 58 precincts. (There are really 59, but the latter is the City Hall where the absentee ballots are counted.) He won a majority of the white wards. And of the 18 lost, he had failed to carry nine by margins of 22 and less. And of the nine others lost, none had gone against him by a substantial margin. There was simply no getting around the fact that while the valued and able Mayor William B. Hartsfield was winning a fifth term, on the basis of progress and efficiency, aldermen committed to the city's future were winning or leading for run-over contests, Dr. Clement had won the most impressive victory of all.

And, even more important, Atlanta seemed proud, if surprised, at having done the job. Thousands had voted for Dr. Clement because they thought he deserved it, and because they believed the more than 25,000 Negro children in the city's schools deserved representation. But none had expected him to win.

The old die-hard KKK element was angry and bitter. They were especially upset because the sky hadn't fallen, the government hadn't capitulated and the graves had not given up their dead. Things went right along and Atlanta seemed, in general, pleased with itself for having done a fair and honest thing within the orderly framework of democracy.

Atlanta, Georgia, and the South could look at themselves and say, after thinking it over, that without doubt there would be backslidings, emotional outbursts, maybe even some violence sparked by the violent, but that what Ben Hill said in 1866 still goes — there is a South of Union and Freedom — and that South, thank God, is living, is breathing, growing every hour.

Dr. George S. Mitchell Honored By Catholic Committee of the South

Dr. George S. Mitchell, executive director of the Southern Regional Council, was honored by the Catholic Committee of the South for "signal contribution to the welfare and progress of the South" on April 24 at a three-day meeting in Richmond, Va. The CCS award, which is given every two years, was presented by the Most Reverend John J. Russell, Bishop of Charleston, S. C. It followed a tribute by Paul D. Williams, a founder of the Catholic Committee of the South and for six years president of the Southern Regional Council.

TEXT OF SCROLL

Dr. Mitchell was given a scroll bearing the following citation:

The Catholic Committee of the South presents its 1953 award to Dr. George Sinclair Mitchell, native Virginian, economist, teacher, administrator, dedicated servant of his Southland, his nation, and his fellow man.

From the beginning of his rich career, he has manifested a deep and selfless devotion to the ideal of a society in which all men and women may find opportunity and justice, dignity and the warm hand of brotherhood.

As a brilliant student and Rhodes scholar, he laid up the store of knowledge which he has applied so fruitfully to the problems of our day.

As Assistant Director of the Farm Security Administration, he put into action programs expressing his deep concern for the needs and aspirations of plain people, and through his skill opened to them the ways to independence and security.

As Executive Director of the Southern Regional Council, he has inspired all of us by the practical example of what the courageous leadership of one man can achieve in lifting the hopes and spirits of the Southern people.

Because of his wisdom and unselfish labor the South has moved closer to the bright future which we all cherish. In testimony of his many accomplishments, we extend to him health and benediction — ad multos annos.

TRIBUTE TO DR. MITCHELL BY PAUL D. WILLIAMS

It has been said that one man of courage is a majority. Dr. George Sinclair Mitchell comes by the virtue of courage gracefully, through a kindly inheritance. His mother was a brave, gracious, blithe spirit. His father, the late Dr. Samuel Chiles Mitchell, was built along heroic lines. He became, even during his lifetime, an institution in the city of Richmond, Virginia.

Formerly the President of the University of Delaware and President of the College of Charleston, the elder Dr. Mitchell chose to spend his last fruitful years as Professor of History at the University of Richmond. Dr. Mitchell's students still breathe his name in hushed reverence whenever they meet, because of his challenge, his original thinking, his ability to make them stir themselves to higher strivings than they thought possible. Freedom was in the blood of Dr. Samuel Chiles Mitchell and freedom was in his very breathing. He had no tolerance for what some people call a respectable mediocrity. He strove to have every man under his tutelage raise himself up to his highest possible level of achievement as a precious person — as, indeed, a man of God.

Dr. George Mitchell is a native of Richmond. He graduated from the University of Richmond with honors, being elected in his senior year to Phi Beta Kappa. From thence he went to Johns Hopkins University, where he received his Ph.D. in economics. Then he was awarded a Rhodes Scholarship, spending three years at Ox-

ford University in England. On his return to America, Dr. Mitchell taught at Columbia University until drafted into government service.

It was in his capacity as Assistant Director of the Farm Security Administration that Dr. Mitchell evidenced a keen concern for the plain people on the land and strove to remove from them the shackles of poverty and bring them to the independence that becomes a man who wants most of all to be free.

DEVOTION TO DUTY

Six years ago, Dr. Mitchell became executive director of the S. R. C. In this office, Dr. Mitchell's greatest asset has been his devotion to duty. General Robert E. Lee once said, "To me the most sublime word in the English dictionary is the word — duty."

The three things that shine forth in Dr. Mitchell's life, at least in my estimation, are his courage, his deep concern for the plain people of the South, and his devotion to duty.

Emerson has said, "Gold and silver are not gifts, they are only excuses for gifts. The only true gift is to give a portion of yourself." In all of his undertakings, Dr. Mitchell has humbly given a liberal portion of himself. That is why the Catholic Committee of the South, representing the Bishops, priests and laity of the Catholic Faith, signals out Dr. Mitchell for special recognition in this year of 1953. Since he has given so generously of himself for the advancement of the South, it is only fitting that we in the Catholic Committee of the South should in return give a portion of ourselves to him in the scroll that soon shall be presented by Bishop Russell of Charleston.

Let it be remembered that the Catholic Committee of the South award has been extended only after the most careful consideration. Among the past recipients have been such personages as the late Dr. George Washington Carver, Dr. Howard W. Odum, Mr. David E. Lilienthal, Mother Katherine Drexel, Archbishop Gerald P. O'Hara, and Dr. Guy B. Johnson.

Words are only words. They cannot possibly bespeak the deep, hidden meaning of the human spirit. What the scroll states is admittedly only feeble. What is left unsaid represents the imperishable meaning of friendship, admiration, and appreciation that all of us in the Catholic Committee of the South feel for a truly superlative gentleman, Dr. George Mitchell — an appreciation expressed perhaps most appropriately in the words of Keats, "Heard melodies are sweet, those unheard are sweeter."

In the homely but manly virtues of courage, deep regard for plain people, devotion to duty are to be found Dr. Mitchell's real stature, and in these virtues he arrives at his high estate of success.

For, after all, what is success? Wealth, fame — these are fleeting. They come and they go like the winds. But true success lies much deeper in the innermost spirit of man. Ruskin has the answer, and in his definition Dr. Mitchell is exemplified:

> "Mighty of mind, mighty of heart, magnanimous — to be this is to be great in life. To be this increasingly is to advance in life. For he only is advancing in life whose blood is growing warmer, whose mind quicker, and whose spirit is entering into living peace — that peace which surpasses all understanding."

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Carter Wesley ..... *Vice-President*
Gordon B. Hancock ..... *Vice-President*
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To attain through research and action programs the ideals and practices of equal opportunity for all peoples in the region.